

JANUARY 13, 2003

It's Been Said Before, But Government Needs Reminding: Nothing In Life Is Free

BY GARY LANDRY

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AmericaWest Airlines announced recently that it would begin offering meals aboard its flights to those passengers wishing to pay extra for the food.

The Phoenix-based airline discontinued food service on many of its routes in a cost-cutting move following the September 11 terrorist attacks. Even before the attacks, airline food had long been criticized for its lack of culinary appeal, but the idea of offering an optional service—in this case food—for an extra price is an idea that government should heed.

Airline passengers need to realize that the food airlines provide—no matter one's opinion of its quality—is not free. They've paid for the meal. The airline figured the cost of providing that meal in a ticket price. The same goes for government services. Government does not provide services to us out of funds it created out of thin air. It gets its funds by taxing us, and those taxes fund the services that government provides.

I recall my days right out of college when I was a newspaper reporter in a small rural town. One of my first assignments was to cover the local county commission meeting. One of the commissioners wanted to spend a fairly hefty sum on a project in his district. His biggest selling point to his fellow commissioners was, "It would not cost the county any money—funds would come from the federal government."

I may have only been about 20 years-old, but I recall how astonished I was at hearing him make such a ridiculous statement, and I still recall feeling my mouth drop open in

amazement. If I were to make such a statement today, my teenage daughter would give me the same look but offer, "Duh"!

The point is, nothing is free. Just as I knew back then that we—all of us taxpayers—fund the federal government and as such, this county commissioner's pet project would indeed cost us something, we consumers must wake up and realize that we pay for what we buy. The total of all the costs associated with a product may be hidden, but nothing is free.

One of the biggest ruses pulled over the eyes of Americans is the social security tax. Many still believe that employers are equally taxed because of the so-called social security matching tax. The first 7.65 percent is deducted from the employee's paycheck, and the employer has to then "match" that tax by paying a like amount. Duh! It's the employee's money! The total 15.30 percent in social security taxes is part of the expense that an employer must figure in hiring an employee.

It's financial dishonesty. Government has practiced this for years. Business too has been guilty of incorporating perks such as adding meals on airlines into the total price of a ticket to get from destination A to destination B.

The move by AmericaWest to separate the costs of the actual price of taking me from A to B, along with a choice to pay extra if I want the perk—in this case, the meal—is a good idea. Now, if only government could tax me for the goods and services I need and let me opt out of the taxes for services I do not want or need.

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